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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN DEFENSE POWER DYNAMICS: PART II OF THE SERIES

REF: A. STATE 37653

[B](#). ABUJA 412

[C](#). ABUJA 526

[D](#). ABUJA 539

[E](#). ABUJA 659

[F](#). ABUJA 676

[G](#). 01 ABUJA 2855 AND PREVIOUS

[H](#). 04 ABUJA 1793 AND PREVIOUS

[I](#). ABUJA 797

[J](#). 04 ABUJA 2076

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (B & D).

[1](#). (S/REL UK) SUMMARY: Leadership of the Nigerian military is personality-driven, from the President through the officer corps. Senior leaders rarely delegate decision-making authority and the "transmission lines" from these power centers are often weak and erratic, frequently leading to a failure by subordinate leaders to implement decisions made by their leadership. Defense Headquarters, led by the Chief of Defense Staff, is staffed by the "second team" and does not seem to have accepted the centrality of peacekeeping to the Nigerian military's mission. The Chief of Army Staff, on the other hand, is using peacekeeping as an engine to drive reform. Despite the professionalism of the Chief of Army Staff, however, personal relationships and political positioning still drive the promotion and assignment processes in the Army. Senior leaders of the Air Force cannot explain why Nigeria even needs an Air Force, but they continue to pursue combat aircraft to battle an unknown threat. Their C-130 fleet will continue to deteriorate beyond its already abysmally low operational readiness until the Nigerian Air Force decides to focus considerable resources and attention on airlift capacity. The Navy is known throughout Nigeria as the most corrupt of the services. Civilian control of the military is in its infancy, but there is some hope that, with the right personalities, both the Ministry of Defense and the legislature will begin to exert more control over the uniformed services. U.S. security assistance efforts will continue to be frustrated by power-jockeying within the services, a lack of basic infrastructure in the headquarters, and by a lack of initiative to follow through on programs seen as being imposed on Nigeria by donor nations. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (S/REL UK) This is the second cable in a three cable series examining the Nigerian military. This cable will look specifically at some of the key actors and agencies in the Nigerian defense establishment, and at the power dynamics among them. The initial series of conversations with the GON about the possibility of opening an ACOTA (African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance) program (Ref A-F) have shed a bit of light on military power dynamics and decision-making in Nigeria, as did the deployment of peacekeepers to Darfur in late 2004.

The President

[3](#). (S) President Obasanjo is always introduced as the President of the Federal Republic and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and seems to take the latter designation very seriously. He even appears at some military events in camouflage uniform (without rank). His past military service has left him very comfortable dealing with the military, and most members of the government seem to accept the prerogative of the President freely to manage the affairs of the uniformed services. The President selects service chiefs without confirmation by the legislature and the Presidency seems to control the military budget, which is anything but transparent. Nevertheless, commitments made by the President still must be acted on by the military, and the "transmission lines" to subordinate authorities seem to be weak and erratic. Getting an assurance from the President that a program will move forward or that a deployment will happen at a particular time has, so far, shown to have little relationship to whether those programs or deployments actually move forward, or how fast they will go.

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14. (S/NF) A source who has dealt with the Nigerian military for more than 30 years as a vendor of communications equipment, and has known the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) for many years (Ogomudia came through the ranks as a signal officer) has some interesting insights into Ogomudia's tenure at Defense Headquarters (DHQ). According to the source, Obasanjo promoted Ogomudia to the position of CDS as a political reward for "taking care" of the situation in Zaki-Biam in 2001, at the direction of the President, while Ogomudia was the Chief of Army Staff (ref G). Understanding Ogomudia's role in the massacre may explain the very emotional response of the CDS to the refusal of the USG to support the deployment of the 72d Para Battalion to Darfur in October 2004 (Ref H).

15. (S) The command philosophy of the CDS seems to favor the "Big Army" concept, dedicated to the defense of the territorial integrity against foreign intrusion (despite the fact that there is no real threat). This means that he does not see peacekeeping as the major mission of the military, and he does not dedicate resources or attention to increasing the military's peacekeeping capacity.

16. (S) DHQ is widely viewed as the "second team." Many of the officers who fill positions there are second string officers and enlisted men. The star performers are more often found in their service headquarters or in operational assignments. There is also no Vice or Deputy CDS. There are, however, three Chiefs who run Training and Operations (CTOP), Logistics, and Administration, and the most senior or the most appropriate to the issue will act in the capacity of the CDS in his absence. Post frequently has difficulty getting access to the CDS. Subordinate officers whom we do end up meeting with, including the three Chiefs, are typically unable to make commitments until they confer with Ogomudia. And often when we do meet with Ogomudia himself, he tends not to engage in conversations.

17. (S/NF) Post reporting from late 2004 indicated that Obasanjo was going to rotate the service chiefs, including the CDS, in early 2005 (Ref J). That plan has fallen by the wayside, and there is no planned rotation in sight. One Embassy contact has told us that although the President has been disappointed in the performance of the CDS, Ogomudia's tenure has been extended through the end of the year. This will allow an additional tranche of officers to retire, without being forced out, perhaps so that the President can dig a little deeper into the ranks to select the next CDS.

The Army

18. (S/NF) Lieutenant General Martin Luther Agwai, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), is viewed by Post as an effective leader of the Army, and is a proponent of closer cooperation with the U.S. He seems to have direct access to the President, and the President seems to rely on Agwai's counsel. However, Agwai shows real deference to the CDS, always referring to him as the boss, and is seemingly unwilling or unable to negotiate around policy roadblocks from DHQ. The idea of "managing up" does not seem to exist in the Nigerian military. "With these guys, seniority is a cult" is the way one observer recently described this relationship. A contact from the Nigerian DIA, in a recent casual conversation, said Agwai is the only service chief who is not corrupt. Nevertheless, Post takes this comment with a dose of salt. "Not corrupt" may better be understood as "not as corrupt" as the others, given the endemic nature of corruption among Nigerian leaders.

19. (S) The command philosophy of the COAS seems to favor peacekeeping as the engine to drive reform. Agwai has said that the legacy he wants to leave is a military better able to conduct peace support operations. The resources for this vision have not been made available just to reform or reprofessionalize the military, but they are available if the word "peacekeeping" is attached, especially from the international donor community. The Peacekeeping Wing at the Infantry Center in Jaji is a great example of Agwai putting his words into practice.

110. (S/NF) Promotions are political at Colonel-level and above, and are completely within the purview of the COAS. Officers need to start worrying about politics as Majors and Lieutenant Colonels to position themselves for future promotions and assignments. Command of the Ikeja Cantonment (Lagos) and of the 3rd Armored Division (Jos) are key positions given to loyal officers, because of the significance of these commands in the event of a national emergency, particularly regime instability (Ikeja can control Lagos, and the Armored Division has tanks that are reasonably close to Abuja).

11. (S/REL UK) The Nigerian Army always has a pool of fresh young soldiers coming up through the ranks, and recruitment appears to be continuous. A key concern is "Federal Character" in the recruiting pool, ensuring that the Army does not take on a regional imbalance. The recruitment process as full of opportunities for corruption as each potential recruit has to get a series of signatures on a form -- and each signature requires a bribe. The total amount of bribes can be significant and the young recruit certainly won't have that amount of money (If he did, he wouldn't be enlisting). The British DATF offered an anecdotal account of one "system" set up to work around this problem: A potential recruit will find a serving soldier and "rent" his weapon. The recruit will then use the weapon to commit enough armed robberies to collect the funds necessary to pay all of the necessary bribes and the rental fee for the weapon. Once the soldier is in the Army, he will then rent his weapon out to future recruits, and the system lives on. While we do not know how widespread this practice is, it is certainly plausible to believe that it does occur.

12. (S) Once in, recruits are integrated into units with soldiers from every state and region of Nigeria, and receive indoctrination training meant to impart a Nigerian national identity on the soldier. This national identity is one of the features the Army is most proud of, and makes the Army one of the only institutions that truly identifies with Nigeria rather than an ethnic group. It also makes the Army function more as a "tribe" separate from the various Nigerian groups, with a similar level of identification and loyalty. This indoctrination begins failing at the upper reaches of the officer corps largely because promotions at that level are politically influenced, which in Nigeria more often than not takes on ethnic and religious meaning. Officers who are not promoted often seek to find a religious or ethnic reason for their failure to advance. Whether this is or is not true has been difficult for us to assess, but the perception of discrimination, if widely accepted, could have a destabilizing influence on the Army's officer corps, and on the nation.

The Air Force

13. (S) The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) is largely irrelevant. Most of the Generals are pilots who feel the need to focus on fighter aircraft to protect Nigerian airspace against foreign incursion (by whom they won't say). With the exception of the helicopter fleet being used in the Niger Delta, most of NAF's aircraft are non-functional. There has been some press coverage of a plan to rehab or replace the MiG-21 fleet with Russian or Romanian support (and Israeli assistance), but there have been no definite moves in this direction. Recent reporting indicates that Nigeria will purchase 18 Chinese F-7 fighters (the Chinese version of the MiG-21) (Comment: Purchasing new aircraft offers significantly more opportunity for graft than refurbishment of the current fleet. End comment.) When asked to justify their service, Air Officer-Operations at Air Force Headquarters (an Air Vice Marshal, and essentially the Deputy Chief of Air Staff) can not articulate a reason for Nigeria to have an Air Force. Post has had no problem with access to the Chief of Air Staff, but he really doesn't have much to do that would keep him from seeing us.

14. (S/NF) The heavy lift capability of Nigeria's C-130 fleet is the feature that distinguishes NAF from most other sub-Saharan African air forces, and the feature that gets them the most attention from the USG. NAF currently has eight C-130s, all in Lagos, but only 1-2 fly on a regular basis (and even these do not meet USAF airworthiness standards). The U.S. has invested significant time and money to assist the NAF to create a plan increasing the utility of this fleet, but the NAF does not seem willing to take ownership of the process. Until they do, there will be no real progress on the issue, but we can expect to hear frequent pleas from senior leaders (including the President) to help them get their C-130s in the air. Pre-sanction FMF (Foreign Military Financing) cases valued at 7.5M USD are open for the C-130s, but this support can only meet a limited part of Nigeria's requirements. For example, to conduct Program Depot Maintenance (PDM) on 6 of the 8 aircraft that are in the best condition will cost approximately 25-30M USD.

The Navy

15. (SBU) Corrupt through and through.

The Ministry of Defense

¶16. (S) When President Obasanjo came to office in 1999, he did not appoint a defense minister, preferring to personally handle those responsibilities. He did eventually appoint a minister, though both the Minister and the Ministry remain largely irrelevant. The uniformed services openly express their contempt and disregard for the Ministry, and the Ministry does not seem to want to assert itself. The biggest bright spot, at least from a U.S. standpoint, is the Minister of State for Defense (essentially the junior Minister). A medical doctor, he has carved out a niche for himself in the Ministry -- improving the conditions of service for Nigeria's soldiers, sailors, and airmen. All of the HIV/AIDS mitigation programs we are engaged in with the military are done with the active partnership of the Minister of State. These efforts may have come to the attention of the President and have shown him that the Minister of State is effective in his position. In the last two weeks, the Minister of State has received press coverage for comments made on the deployment of additional soldiers to the Niger Delta and on small arms destruction programs. Whether this is the Minister of State getting more involved in policy matters, or simply a temporary media blip, will be shown with time. The Embassy contact who shared the information on the tenure of the CDS being extended also bruited Agwai's name as a possible Minister of Defense after the latter's retirement. The installation of a strong Minister, whether Agwai or someone else, would be a signal that the President wanted more effectively to subordinate the military to civilian control as opposed to his own personal control. The military would likely only respond to a move like this if the Minister were someone well-respected from within their ranks.

The Legislature

¶17. (S) The National Assembly plays a limited role in national politics, and their involvement in defense issues is no exception. The idea of defense oversight by the legislature is resisted by the military, the Presidency, and even by many members of the Assembly (particularly those who formerly wore uniforms). However, some legislators envision a Nigeria where the military does answer to the National Assembly. The visit by the U.S. National War College to the House Committee on Defense (Ref I) highlighted many of the issues and opportunities present. In conversations following the formal session, several members of the Committee commented to U.S. students that they wanted to be "more than just a rubber stamp" for the President. The session exposed the legislators' lack of a clear idea about how to go about becoming something more, and what responsibilities they should seek.

¶18. (S) A bill on military professionalization is on the floor of the National Assembly. It would create an Armed Services Commission, composed of interested members of Nigerian society, to examine the military's promotion system and to recommend changes creating a set of standards and essentially removing the current political aspect to promotions. The bill is stuck in Committee, its author said, because legislators who are former members of the military don't see this level of oversight as appropriate, and because there has been significant pressure from senior military leaders, including Agwai, to kill the bill. Movement on this issue is unlikely until after the National Assembly's summer recess.

Comment

¶19. (S) Working with the Nigerian military, both as an operational partner for peacekeeping operations and with security assistance programs, is frequently frustrating, and the responses we get from our approaches often do not seem to make sense. Whether our difficulties stem from a nationalist reluctance to work with America, disagreement with policy, or an "oga" (Nigerian term for chief/"big man") carving out some bit of authority and making sure that everybody sees his power, the results are the same. When working with the Nigerian government on defense issues, whether for specific initiatives or toward broader goals such as counter-terrorism or a secure Gulf of Guinea, the Nigerians want to create a plan that they own. In principle, they will accept any donor proposal that comes with a budget, but there will be constant frustration from the donors when projects fail to move forward. Sometimes delay will stem from a lack of basic infrastructure in their headquarters (phone lines, dedicated computer access), but a significant part also comes from a lack of Nigerian initiative to follow through on programs that they see as imposed by the West. This is especially true when many military leaders question whether America can be trusted as a friend over the long term. We frequently hear about how unfair Leahy sanctions are, and confusion about how we can approach them with new proposals, like ACOTA, when we can't involve them in IMET, which they crave.

120. (S) Many in both the Nigerian military and the broader government are concerned about U.S. intentions, seeing us as seeking to control Gulf of Guinea oil reserves. This concern could worsen over time as the coming generational change in military leadership will bring in many of the officers who have been lost to U.S. influence as a result of sanctions. Still, the U.S. is still revered by most individual officers, even in the absence of real contact with U.S. training. Most, if not all, officers and soldiers who have been exposed to U.S. trainers have come away with a very positive impression. The challenge is finding programs the Nigerian government and military see as beneficial to their interests, and then finding ways to apply American influence to those programs. Sending a constant stream of offers to Defense Headquarters for programs the Nigerians have never asked for has not created a bank of goodwill for us to draw on in times of need. In fact, the "recipient fatigue" that the higher echelons of Nigeria's military seem to suffer often works against us when we really need access, such as during the deployment of peacekeepers.

CAMPBELL